

Baptismal Regeneration: Central Doctrine, According to Luther & Lutheranism

Biblical Evidence for Catholicism

Baptismal Regeneration: Central Doctrine, According to Luther & Lutheranism
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Martin Luther, Bust in Three-Quarter View (1520), by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553) [public domain / [Wikimedia Commons](#)]

(1996)

Scripture seems to clearly refer to baptismal regeneration in Acts 2:38 (*forgiveness of sins*), 22:16 (*wash away your sins*), Romans 6:3-4, 1 Corinthians 6:11, Titus 3:5 (*he saved us, . . . by the washing of regeneration*), and other passages.

For this reason, many prominent Protestant individuals and denominations have held to the position of baptismal regeneration, which is anathema to the Baptist / Presbyterian / Reformed branch of Protestantism – the predominant evangelical outlook at present. We need look no further than Martin Luther himself, from whom all Protestants inherit their understanding of both *sola Scriptura* and *faith alone* (*sola fide*) as the prerequisites for salvation and justification. Luther largely agrees with the Catholic position on sacramental and regenerative infant baptism:

Little children . . . are free in every way, secure and saved solely through the glory of their baptism . . . Through the prayer of the believing church which presents it, . . . the infant is changed, cleansed, and renewed by inpoured faith. Nor should I doubt that even a godless adult could be changed, in any of the sacraments, if the same church prayed for and presented him, as we read of the paralytic in the Gospel, who was healed through the faith of others (Mark 2:3-12). I should be ready to admit that in this sense the sacraments of the New Law are efficacious in conferring grace, not only to those who do not, but even to those who do most obstinately present an obstacle.” (The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520, from the translation of A. T. W. Steinhauser, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, revised edition, 1970, 197)

Likewise, in his *Large Catechism* (1529), Luther writes:

Expressed in the simplest form, the power, the effect, the benefit, the fruit and the purpose of baptism is to save. No one is baptized that he may become a prince, but, as the words declare [of Mark 16:16], that he may be saved. But to be saved, we know very well, is to be delivered from sin, death, and Satan, and to enter Christ’s kingdom and live forever with him . . . Through the Word, baptism receives the power to become the washing of regeneration, as St. Paul calls it in Titus 3:5 . . . Faith clings to the water and believes it to be baptism which effects pure salvation and life . . . When sin and conscience oppress us . . . you may say: It is a fact that I am baptized, but, being baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and obtain eternal life for both soul and body . . . Hence, no greater jewel can adorn our body or soul than

baptism; for through it perfect holiness and salvation become accessible to us . . . (From edition by Augsburg Publishing House [Minneapolis], 1935, sections 223-224, 230, pages 162, 165)

All the major Lutheran denominations hold to baptismal regeneration. According to Mead's *Handbook of Denominations* (I have a 1970 ed.), Lutherans accept Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, both of which clearly teach baptismal regeneration. The Smalcald Articles were also written by Luther. The Formula of Concord, also accepted by most if not all Lutheran bodies, states in its Article XII, section on "Erroneous Articles of the Schwenkfelders":

We reject and condemn these errors . . . : 3. That the water of Baptism is not a means whereby the Lord God seals the adoption of sons and works regeneration.

Mead writes about general Lutheran belief:

Infants are baptized, and baptized persons are believed to receive the gift of regeneration from the Holy Ghost. (p. 129)

Looking through the various Lutheran denominations, I see that the old American Lutheran Church (now part of the current ELCA) holds to the two catechisms, the Book of Concord, and the Smalcald Articles, as does the LCMS (the largest orthodox Lutheran group left, which hasn't sanctioned abortion and various liberal heterodox assumptions, etc.).

I highly doubt that the Wisconsin Synod would believe any differently, being a very conservative group. Indeed, Mead says they are "very close" to LCMS theology. If a self-described "Lutheran" denies baptismal regeneration, then they are no representatives of Lutheranism, traditionally understood, but rather some nebulous entity which may still be *called* Lutheranism, but in actuality no longer is.

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